Becoming a Woman of *excellence*

**CHAPTER FIVE**

*excellence*

**EXEMPLIFIED BY OBEDIENCE**

“For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

Philippians 2:13 (KJV)

The life hid with God is a hidden life, as to its source, but it must not be hidden as to its practical results. People must see that we walk as Christ walked, if we say that we are abiding in Him. We must prove that we ‘possess’ that which we ‘profess.’” A one-word summary of Hannah Whitall Smith’s thoughts could be *obedience.* Obedience is submission, habitually yielding to authority. If we have surrendered our lives to God, then it will be natural to want to yield to His authority, to obey His commands and to please Him by living His way.

But obedience is not forced; it is motivated by a heart of love, David wrote in Psalm 40:8, “I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart” (KJV). John Flavell commented, “Your delight and readiness in the paths of obedience is the very measure of your sanctification.” Why has God asked us to obey Him, and how do we habitually submit?

**Obeying for Our Good**

1. Deuteronomy 10:12-13 summarizes some key aspects of the Christian life. As you read these verses, write down what we are asked to do and why we should keep or obey the Lord’s commandments.

   Oh that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!

   Deuteronomy 5:29

2. Psalm 119 expresses a wholehearted love for God’s Word. What does each of the following verses tell you about the psalmist’s attitudes toward God’s commands?

   verse 2

   verse 129

   verse 167
3. Often I will be prompted by the Holy Spirit to call a friend, write a letter, or serve someone in a special way. I will respond by thinking, *Yes, that’s a good idea, I’ll do that,* but then there are times I never get around to following through. Jesus taught about this particular attitude toward obedience. Read Matthew 21:28-32 and Luke 6:46-49 and write a brief paragraph summarizing His teaching on obedience. What is the major lesson in it for you?

In C.S. Lewis’ *The Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape (Satan) instructs his demon nephew, Wormwood, on how to keep his Christian “patient” from obeying the Lord. Here is part of his letter: “Let him do anything but act. No amount of piety in his imagination and afflictions will harm us if we can keep it out of his will.”

How very true that is! The Greek word *hypakouo* is translated “to obey.” It means to listen to, to answer. Jesus taught that a wise man hears and acts. How we listen to God and His Word determines our response.

4. Read Genesis 2:8-3:7. This passage relates the first command given (Genesis 2:16-17) and the first disobedience (Genesis 3:6-7). After reading these verses carefully, record your thoughts about the questions below.

   a. Explain Satan’s temptation of Eve and why you think Eve responded as she did.

   b. Do you think it’s possible that Eve felt God’s command was not really for her good – because it denied her something, rather than promising to protect her? Why might she have felt this way?

   c. Note the similarities between Eve’s progression to disobedience (Genesis 3:6) and the progression in James 1:13-15. What can you learn about yielding to temptation from these verses?

   d. Paul wrote, “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being deceived, was in transgression” (1 Timothy 2:14). To deceive means to cause to accept what is false, especially by trickery or misrepresentation. Why do you think Eve was so easily deceived? What could Eve have done to avoid Satan’s deception?

   e. From your study of Eve, which thoughts challenge you in your own obedience to God?

5. Lot’s wife had also been given a specific command before the destruction of Sodom. Read Genesis 19:15-17 and 19:26. Why do you think she looked back?

6. What can you learn from her example about obedience and God’s purpose in giving us commands?

**Obeying with His Power**
Our Lord never insists upon obedience; He tells us very emphatically what we ought to do, but He never takes means to make us do it. We have to obey Him out of a oneness of spirit.  

Oswald Chambers

7. It is our choice to obey or disobey God. His desire is voluntary submission. If we desire to yield to Him in what He has asked us to do, then we are not alone in our goal of obedience. How do these Scriptures encourage us in our obedience?

Isaiah 30:21

Philippians 2:13

Philippians 4:13

Amy Carmichael writes, “Do I will to do the will of God? Then God will reinforce my will and enable me to do. Do I will to know the will of God? Then I will not take into consideration my own feelings and interest, ‘for even Christ pleased not Himself’ – ‘never once consulted His own pleasure” (Romans 15:3).


Examine the chart below that parallels the temptation of Eve and the temptation of Jesus. Write down what you learn about Satan’s tactics and what you can do to strengthen the part of your life in which you feel most vulnerable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temptation</th>
<th>Genesis 3</th>
<th>Matthew 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appeal to Physical appetite</td>
<td>You may eat of any tree (3:1)</td>
<td>You may eat by changing stones to bread (4:3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeal to personal gain</td>
<td>You will not die (3:4)</td>
<td>You will not hurt your foot (4:6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeal to power or glory</td>
<td>You will be like God (3:5)</td>
<td>You will have all the world’s kingdoms (4:8-9)</td>
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The Wuest translation of 1 John 2:16-17 says: “Because everything which is in the world, the passionate desire of the flesh, and the passionate desire of the eyes, and the insolent and empty assurance which trusts in the things that serve the creature life, is not from the Father as a source by is from the world as a source but is from the world as a source. And the world is being caused to pass away, and its passionate desires. But the one who keeps on habitually doing the will of God abides forever.”
AUTHOR’S REFLECTION – For me, obedience issues are related not so much to temptations to yield to evil as they are to struggles to do what I should. Procrastination, over-commitment to activities, and not living my priorities are my battlefields in this area. James wrote, “Therefore, to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” (4:17). Most of my temptations and testings involve a choice to engage in activities that, although basically good in themselves, might come at the expense of my walk with God, my family, or other responsibilities. Just as Eve was deceived into thinking that she would become wise by eating the fruit, so I am often misled into wrong choices because I think they are good.

Joshua at one time entered into a covenant of peace with the Gibeonites, although God had clearly instructed that they were to be conquered. Joshua and the elders were deceived by circumstances, and it is recorded in Joshua 9:14 that they “asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord.”

If only Eve had sought the counsel of God. If only I would take time to ask God’s thoughts concerning my decisions. James wrote that if we lack wisdom when encountering trials and testings in our lives, we should ask God for direction. The Living Bible paraphrases James 1:5, “If you want to know what God wants you to do, ask him, and he will gladly tell you, for he is always ready to give a bountiful supply of wisdom to all who ask him; he will not resent it.” If I want to become a woman of excellence, I will take time to ask, listen, and then act.

Obeying for Our Growth

Above anything else, God’s desire for us is that we become like His Son. We find in Scripture that Jesus learned obedience from the things which He suffered. Hebrews 5:8. Certainly one of the major ways that God has for us to learn obedience and to grow strong in our faith is by resisting temptations and persevering through trials. Jesus is our model; just as He was tempted and tried, so must we be challenged in the same way. How we respond to various testings reveals whether or not we have a heart to obey.

9. Paul tells us to have the same attitude as Christ. What attitude did Jesus manifest in order to become obedient? (Philippians 2:5-8)

10. Read James 1:2-4 and 1 Peter 1:6-7. What are the purposes of trials, and how should we respond to them?

   It is important to note that James did not say that a believer should be joyous for the trials, but in the trials. . . . Stress deepens and strengthens a Christian’s faith and lets its reality be displayed.

11. What is promised to those who learn obedience through suffering?

   James 1:12
   
   James 5:11
   
   1 Peter 5:10
“It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.” (Psalm 119:71)

“The present circumstance, which presses so hard against you, (if surrendered to Christ) is the best shaped tool in the Father’s hand to chisel you for eternity. Trust Him, then. Do not push away the instrument lest you lose its work.”

We could define obedience as *willingly submitting to the process God has chosen for us to be conformed to the image of His Son.*

12. Is there a situation in your life with which you are struggling? How can you begin to specifically respond in a biblical way to this trial?

13. As you look back over your study in this chapter, can you see any specific ways in which the Lord might be leading you to strengthen your obedience to Him?

**SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE MEMORY: Philippians 2:13**

> The very best proof of your love for your Lord is obedience. . . nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.

*Charles R. Swindoll*

Jesus has said “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatever I command you.” (John 15:14)